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Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: UR, US, PEPR, SOPN
SUBJECT: ARBATOV ON U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS

SUMMARY: PRAVDA MARCH 28 CARRIES LENGTHY ARTICLE BY USA INSTITUTE DIRECTOR ARBATOV ON SOVIET-U.S. RELATIONS AND
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SALT. MESSAGE IS CONTAINED IN THE TITLE "TIME FOR RESPONSIBLE DECISIONS." PURPOSE OF PIECE IS TO ADD TO PRESSURE ON ADMINISTRATION TO CONCLUDE SALT AGREEMENT QUICKLY. ARBATOV CONVEYS IMPRESSION THAT HIGHLY FAVORABLE PROSPECTS WOULD FOLLOW CONCLUSION OF SALT II, WHILE FAILURE TO COMPLETE AGREEMENT COULD LEAD TO EXTREMELY BLEAK SITUATION FOR SOVIET-U.S. RELATIONS, INCLUDING

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"THE GROWTH OF THE THREAT OF WAR." END SUMMARY.

1. ARBATOV'S ARTICLE (ASSUME DEPARTMENT HAS SHORT TASS SUMMARY) FURTHER DEVELOPS THEME SEEN FREQUENTLY OF LATE IN SOVIET PRESS WARNING THAT THE CURRENT "SLOWING DOWN" IN THE PACE OF SOVIET-U.S. RELATIONS THREATENS TO GIVE RISE TO "NEW DIFFICULTIES, TO A SLIPPING BACKWARD." THIS SLOWING DOWN, OF COURSE, IS ALLEGED TO BE WHOLLY THE FAULT OF THE U.S. THE ADMINISTRATION TAKES MUCH OF THE BLAME. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, ARBATOV CLAIMS THAT THE U.S. POLITICAL SITUATION SHOULD NOT BE SEEN IN SIMPLISTIC TERMS.

2. WITH THIS INTRODUCTION ARBATOV MOVES TO A DISCUSSION OF SALT, WHICH HE DESCRIBES AS "THE MOST IMPORTANT, URGENT" QUESTION. NEGOTIATIONS HAVE REACHED A STAGE WHERE PROGRESS DEPENDS NO LONGER ON TECHNICAL DECISIONS AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE BUT ON "A PRINCIPLED POLITICAL DECISION BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT." ARBATOV ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN U.S. "VACILLATIONS", MOVING FIRST TO REFUTE EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH LINKAGE WITH EXTRANEOUS MATTERS SUCH AS EVENTS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA. (HE POINTS OUT THAT TENSION THERE WAS CAUSED BY SOMALI INVASION WHICH WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN IF SOMALIS HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO COUNT ON U.S. SUPPORT.) ARBATOV CLAIMS THAT THE "SOVIET THREAT" ARGUMENT USED BY SOME LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN THE U.S. DOES NOT RESULT FROM A FEAR OF U.S. INFERIORITY, BUT FROM A REFUSAL TO ACCEPT THE CONCEPT OF PARITY.

3. CITING SUCH OPPONENTS TO SALT, ARBATOV MOVES THEN TO THE HEART OF HIS ARGUMENT. HE CLAIMS TO RECOGNIZE THE DEPTH OF THE OPPOSITION IN THE U.S. TO SALT II, SUGGESTS THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAS FAILED TO MARSHAL ITS ARGUMENTS PROPERLY AGAINST THIS OPPOSITION, AND CONCLUDES THAT THIS IS DUE TO THE ADMINISTRATION'S "AMBIGUITY" ON THE QUESTION OF SALT: I.E., IT WANTS TO HAVE AN AGREEMENT AND AT THE SAME TIME TO DEVELOP "NEW DANGEROUS TYPES OF WEAPONS." THE ADMINISTRATION, THEN, HAS MADE "DANGEROUS COMPROMISES" WITH ITS CRITICS AND AT THE SAME TIME IS USING THE PUTATIVE STRENGTH OF THESE CRITICS "TO PRESSURE" THE USSR IN ORDER TO OBTAIN "ONE-SIDED CONCESSIONS." LATTER, HE SAYS, IS DEAD-END.

4. ARBATOV CONCLUDES FROM THIS THAT "THE TIME HAS COME WHEN IT IS NECESSARY AT LEAST TO DECIDE: WILL THERE OR WILL THERE NOT BE AN AGREEMENT." MUCH HANGS ON THE RESOLUTION OF THIS PROBLEM, HE ARGUES, FOR A REJECTION

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OF AN AGREEMENT COULD MEAN THE BREAK DOWN OF THE SOVIET-AMERICAN DIALOGUE ON BASIC QUESTIONS OF SECURITY AND THE GROWTH OF THE THREAT OF WAR." HE THEN CRITICIZES THE PRESIDENT'S WAKE FOREST SPEECH FOR ITS CONTRADICTORY ELEMENTS, SOME OF WHICH SUGGEST A "RETURN TO 'A POLICY OF STRENGTH'" AND WARNS OF THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW MILITARY TECHNOLOGY WHICH CAN LEAD TO A BREAK DOWN OF CURRENT "RELATIVE STABILITY."
5. COMMENT: ARBATOV'S ARTICLE SHOWS A DEGREE OF SOPHISTICATION ABOUT THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SITUATION WHICH DOES NOT APPEAR IN ANY OTHER SOVIET COMMENTATOR. THE TIMING OF THE ARTICLE IS SIGNIFICANT SINCE ARBATOV

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WRITES VERY INFREQUENTLY IN PRAVDA -- ONLY ONCE OR TWICE A YEAR. HE HAS OBVIOUSLY READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE PUBLIC

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DEBATE IN THE U.S. ABOUT THE TIMING OF A SALT II AGREE-
MENT AND PROBABLY HAS CONVINCED OTHERS IN THE SOVIET
LEADERSHIP THAT THE TIME IS RIPE FOR AN AUTHORITATIVE
PIECE, SUCH AS HIS OWN, TO PASS A PUBLIC MESSAGE TO THE
U.S. THAT A DECISION ON WHETHER TO PROCEED WITH SALT II
SHOULD BE MADE SOON AND THAT THE DECISION SHOULD BE TO
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PROCEED, NOT TO DELAY.

6. ARBATOV'S ARGUMENT IS THAT SUCH A DECISION IS ONE
WHICH CAN BE MADE IN WASHINGTON AND THAT THE ADMINISTRA-
TION, WHICH HE CLAIMS HAS BEEN "VACILLATING" AND
"AMBIGUOUS," MUST DECIDE. TO PUT THE PRESSURE ON, HE
SUGGESTS THAT A DECISION NOT TO PROCEED WOULD INEVITABLY
OPEN UP THE ARMS RACE FOR MANY YEARS TO COME, AND PAINTS
A BLEAK PICTURE OF SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS
IF AGREEMENT IS NOT REACHED SOON.

7. THE ARTICLE REVEALS A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE
REALITY OF THE OPPOSITION TO SALT ON THE HILL AND IN
THE PUBLIC. NEVERTHELESS, ARBATOV ASSERTS THAT ADMINI-
STRATION HELPS TO SHAPE THAT OPINION BY ITS ATTITUDES
AND ACTIONS AND THAT, IN THE SOVIET VIEW, THE ADMINI-
STRATION HAS NOT USED THE LEVERS AT ITS COMMAND TO
COUNTER THE ANTI-SALT FORCES.

8. ARBATOV'S CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT'S WAKE FOREST
SPEECH STOPS JUST SHORT OF THE RECENT TASS CRITIQUE
(MOSCOW 5081). RATHER THAN STATE THAT THE SPEECH IS A
TURNING POINT IN THE COURSE OF ADMINISTRATION FOREIGN
POLICY, HE PRETENDS NOT TO KNOW HOW TO INTERPRET IT,
AND RHETORICALLY ASKS WHETHER IT IS A "SHIFT IN ACCENT,"
AND A RETURN TO THE "POLICY OF STRENGTH." SEEING ELEMENTS
IN THE SPEECH WHICH CANNOT BE "RECONCILED," ARBATOV ADDS
THE WAKE FOREST SPEECH TO THE LIST OF CONTRADICTORY AND
"AMBIGUOUS" ASPECTS OF U.S. POLICY.

9. WHAT IS DISTURBING ABOUT THE LISTING OF THESE
"AMBIGUITIES" IS THAT THEY ARE SEEN AS, IN LARGE PART,
DELIBERATE ONES, FOSTERED BY THE ADMINISTRATION TO
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SERVE ITS POLICY GOALS. THERE IS NO ATTEMPT TO
EXCUSE THE SITUATION OR TO EXPLAIN IT IN POSITIVE TERMS.
THUS, THEMESSAGE TO THE INTERNAL AUDIENCE, WHICH COMPLE-

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MENTS THE MESSAGE TO WASHINGTON, IS THAT THE U.S. IS TO BLAME FOR THE DELAYS IN SALT AND THE ADMINISTRATION IS DELIBERATELY ALLOWING AND EVEN CAUSING PROBLEMS TO COMPLICATE THE SALT PROCESS.

10. UNLIKE THE LAST ARBATOV ARTICLE IN PRAVDA THERE IS NO FINAL POSITIVE NOTE TO THE PIECE. THE CONCLUSION AMOUNTS TO MORE OF A WARNING THAN AN ASSESSMENT; IF THERE IS NO SALT II AGREEMENT SOON RELATIONS WILL SERIOUSLY DETERIORATE.

11. WHILE ARBATOV'S ARGUMENTS ARE ON A SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER LEVEL THAN USUALLY ENCOUNTERED IN THE SOVIET PRESS AND WHILE HE SHOWS A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE U.S. SCENE THAN NORMALLY FOUND HERE, IN THE END HE SHOWS NO MORE WILLINGNESS TO COMPREHEND THE COMPLEXITIES OF U.S. POLITICS THAN ANY OTHER SOVIET COMMENTATOR. PROBLEMS IN SOVIET-U.S. RELATIONS ARE STILL TO BE LAID ENTIRELY AT THE U.S. DOOR AND SOVIET POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES ARE NOT SEEN AS IMPEDIMENTS TO BETTER RELATIONS. IN THIS RESPECT, ARBATOV'S PIECE IS INSTRUCTIVE FOR AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FUTURE COURSE OF OUR RELATIONS WITH THE USSR, SINCE ARBATOV HIMSELF DOES NOT SEEM ABLE TO RISE ABOVE THE PROPAGANDISTIC, MONO-CHROMATIC ASSESSMENTS OF THE U.S. FOUND ELSEWHERE DAILY ON THE PAGES OF PRAVDA. IN A WORD, THE U.S. MUST MOVE, AND THIS IS WHAT WAS MEANT BY BREZHNEV'S STRESS ON THE NEED FOR DYNAMISM IN HIS FEB. 24 SPEECH. TOON

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